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ABSTRACT

In a time when job opportunities are changing, the opinions of those who hire and supervise psychologists are important. To determine employer preferences in psychologist selection, 105 Philadelphia administrators completed a survey (39% response) rating the importance of various functions, areas of knowledge, and personal characteristics for professional psychologists. Factor analysis of the respondents' ratings of the three categories yielded the following "essential" components: six function factors (vocational, therapy, clinical appraisal, supervision, consultation, and bio-behavioral); two characteristics factors (innovative and treatment-oriented); and six knowledge factors (psychodiagnosis, applied learning, vocational, developmental knowledge, quantitative research methods, and biological areas). The pattern of correlations were further reduced into a practitioner-oriented and a scientist-oriented grouping. These findings are consistent with national studies of counseling and clinical psychology and as such have important implications for education, graduate students, and employers. A table shows the details of survey results. (Author/BL)

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What Do Employers Want?
Functions, Knowledge, and Characteristics Desired of Professional Psychologists

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Running head: Functions and Knowledge

Paper prepared for the Eastern Psychological Association Annual Meeting in Baltimore, Maryland April 1984

ABSTRACT

In a time when opportunities may be changing, the opinions of those who hire, supervise and sometimes fire psychologists are important. To determine what they prefer when they select a psychologist, we surveyed a sample of 105 administrators in the Philadelphia area. Our survey form included 40 functions, 36 areas of knowledge and 15 personal characteristics. Respondents were asked to indicate the importance of each item. Six function items and seven knowledge items were considered essential by a majority of respondents. Factor analyses identified six functions, two characteristics, and six areas of knowledge. Treated as components, the intercorrelations suggested a further reduction into a practitioner-oriented and a scientist-oriented pattern. Implications for the profession and for educators, employers, and students were discussed.

What Do Employers Want? Functions, Knowledge and Characteristics Desired of Professional Psychologists

In a time when opportunities may be changing, the opinions of those who hire, supervise and sometimes fire psychologists are important. To determine what they prefer when they select a psychologist, we surveyed a sample of administrators in the Philadelphia area. This paper presents factor analyses of desired functions, (or the activities of a psychologist in a particular setting), knowledge areas, and personal characteristics. Although comparable surveys such as those by Garfield and Kurtz (1975) of clinical psychologists, Goldschmitt, Tipton and Wiggins'(1981) survey of counseling psychologists and Dorken and Webb's (1979) study of health care psychologists have recently been published, the present study is distinctive in that it samples across specialties at a regional level.

Method

One hundred and five administrators completed usable survey forms, a 39 percent return. Representative titles of these administrators were director, assistant director,or program director. The most popular specialties represented were clinical, counseling, rehabilitation, school and child psychology. Settings included mental health/mental retardation centers, hospitals, independent practices, community agencies, public and private schools, and colleges.

In order to create the survey form, the published literature was examined and semifocused interviews with selected employers in the New York area were conducted. Based on obtained information, we developed a pool of items. We circulated a draft questionnaire for comment by

colleagues and piloted it on several administrators in the Greater New York area. The final form included 40 functions such as "uses hypnosis" and "works with ethnic minorities", as well as 36 areas of knowledge such as "developmental psychology" and "laws and regulations" and 15 descriptions of personal characteristics such as "innovative" and "reads journals".

Respondents were asked to answer each item based on how important the characteristic would be if they were selecting a member for their staff. A Likert five-point response scale included: "makes no difference or not desirable", "somewhat desirable", "desirable", "very desirable" and "essential".

A mailing list of agencies, mental health centers, hospitals, college counseling centers, school systems and private and public clinics in the greater Philadelphia area was developed from an array of sources such as the APA Biographical Directory and blue pages of the telephone book. Non-respondents were followed up by mail and telephone according to standard survey procedures.

Data analyses included computation of means, standard deviations, and frequencies. The functions, knowledge and personal characteristic items were factor analyzed separately. For each of these domains factors were extracted, rotated and interpreted. For each factor a unit-weighted composite of scores on the highly loaded items was constructed.

Results and Discussion

First we examined the results in terms of the most popular items in each category of Functions, Knowledge, and Personal Characteristics.

Six functions were rated "essential" by a majority of respondents: Participates as a member of a professional team, prepares written reports, participates in case conferences, conducts individual personal counseling and psychotherapy, administers and interprets psychodiagnostic tests, and helps client to cope with mental illness.

Six areas of knowledge were nominated as essential by a majority of respondents: abnormal psychology, psychodiagnosis, personality, psychotherapy, counseling, and developmental psychology. Five personal characteristics noted as essential were flexibility, genuineness, intelligence, caring, and empathy.

When each of these three categories was subjected to a separate factor analysis (table 1) the preferred functions of psychologists yielded six factors. The first we called Vocational. It was comprised of items such as conducts vocational and educational counseling, administers and interprets vocational tests, provides rehabilitation, placement, and works with handicapped. The next factor we labeled Therapy. As you can see its item make-up included conducting counseling and therapy for individuals, couples, families, groups, and for those with physical or mental illnesses.

Among items loading on the factor, Clinical Appraisal, were administering and interpreting an array of psychological tests and presenting the results in reports and at case conferences.

The Supervision factor may have included supervisors in a work setting and an academic setting since it included such items as conducts research and teaches small groups. The factor we called Consultation involved children, since the consultations were with parents and with teachers.

Finally, the Biobehavioral Function included the use of biofeedback and hypnosis.

From items connected with preferred areas of knowledge we also extracted six factors: Psychodiagnosis tapped the professional's knowledge of abnormal psychology as well as therapy and testing. In addition knowledge of how to label findings, using the DSM III, was important.

The factor entitled Applied Learning included knowledge of physical and mental disabilities, ways to assess such disabilities, and behavior modification and educational psychology, presumably to address or improve the clients' functioning.

Where is the factor in the Functions category labeled Vocational was directed toward counseling, testing and rehabilitation, the Vocational factor in the knowledge area was more diverse by including values of clarification and job opportunities in addition to counseling and vocational psychology.

Developmental included knowledge of child development, personality, individual differences, and social psychology. The items included in Quantitative addressed knowledge of research and its necessary tools--namely statistics and computers.

The last factor, Biological, tapped biological basis of behavior and community resources.

The area of personal characteristics split into two distinct factors--the Scientist who reads journals, publishes, and is innovative and curious, and the Practitioner who is genuine, empathic, flexible, caring, can handle the team and him or herself, is curious, and has a

sense of humor.

Significant correlations among these 14 factorial composites are shown in Table 2. After inspecting the pattern of correlations, we placed them in the specific sequence of factors shown in the table. As you can see, two loose clusters of variables emerged, a practitioner cluster and a scientist grouping.

In conclusion, we believe these findings about a group of individuals in the Philadelphia area who hire psychologists permit the identification of a common core of functions and areas of knowledge desired for professional psychologists at the time of the survey. When considered as single items, the essential functions such as participating on the team, preparing written reports, and conducting individual counseling and therapy seem traditional and the areas of knowledge seem directly relevant to practice. In contrast, such fadish, or at least less universally accepted, functions as using hypnosis, biofeedback, or administering drug treatment and such new topic areas as computer processing and ethnography, had very little support. A number of discrepancies were noted between respondent preferences and current practices recommended for APA approval of graduate programs. Whereas APA places emphasis on students' knowledge of history and systems of psychology as well as physiological psychology and research, these areas were not viewed as important by the people hiring. Nor was an APA internship a necessary prerequisite. Delivering this paper at this conference, according to our sample, is not particularly valued and will not help me get a job with these administrators!

At a time when specialties, functions and areas of knowledge may

seem to be expanding, the factor analyses were useful in first reducing the functions, characteristics and areas of knowledge to 14 composites. Treated as scores, these factors can then more manageably be related to specialty areas or job settings in additional analyses.

The pattern of intercorrelations suggested a further reduction into a split between practitioner-oriented and scientist-oriented factors. However, judging by item mean values of desirability, one cannot conclude that the Boulder model is alive and well in Philadelphia!

In addition, the findings were consistent with such national studies of counseling and clinical psychologists as those by Goldschmitt, Tipton, and Wiggins (1981), Soper and Smith (1978), Norcross and Prochaska (1982), and Garfield and Kurtz (1975).

Finally, we believe that our results will be of value to educators, supervisors, graduate students and employers of professional psychologists both in the Philadelphia area and elsewhere.

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Table 1

Factor Loadings on Functions, Knowledge Areas, and Characteristics Desired of Professional Psychologists (N=105)

Mean	SD	Loadings	
			FUNCTIONS
			I Vocational
2.45	1.15	.81	Conducts vocational counseling.
2.32	1.23	.72	Administers and interprets vocational tests.
2.79	1.26	.66	Conducts educational counseling.
2.04	1.06	.62	Provides vocational rehabilitation.
2.93	1.35	.58	Administers and interprets educational tests.
1.61	.97	.57	Places clients in jobs.
2.96	1.43	.56	Works with handicapped.
1.91	1.08	.55	Remediates reading and study skills.
			II Psychotherapy
4.14	1.25	.83	Conducts individual personal counseling and psychotherapy.
2.91	1.37	.78	Conducts couple therapy.
3.97	1.31	.75	Helps client to cope with mental illness.
3.17	1.14	.73	Conducts family therapy.
2.65	1.16	.64	Helps client to cope with mental illness.
3.62	1.19	.61	Provides group personal counseling and psychotherapy.
3.40	1.48		Applies non-sexist counseling
			III Clinical Appraisal
4.09	1.18	.86	Administers and interprets psychodiagnostic tests.
3.95	1.12	.79	Assesses intellectual characteristics.
3.77	1.20	.70	Administers and interprets projective technique
3.48	1.32	.63	Administers and interprets personality inventories.
4.22	1.10	.57	Participates in case conferences.
4.44	.83	.53	Prepares written reports.

Table 1

Mean	SD	Loadings	
			IV Supervision
3.22	1.13	.77	Supervises or coordinates work of other professionals.
3.24	1.32	.60	Supervises students and para-professionals.
3.67	1.34	.54	Works with ethnic minorities.
2.94	1.24	.53	Administers intervention program.
2.52	1.20	.53	Conducts research.
2.51	1.10	.52	Teaches small groups.
			V Consultation
3.79	1.23	.77	Consults with parents.
3.17	1.35	.72	Consults with teachers.
2.13	1.27	.66	Provides play therapy.
			VI Biobehavioral
1.98	1.10	.70	Uses biofeedback.
1.73	1.04	.68	Uses hypnosis.
			AREAS OF KNOWLEDGE
			I Applied Learning
3.60	1.22	.79	Learning disabilities.
3.16	1.32	.76	Mental retardation.
3.56	1.10	.63	Behavior modification.
4.22	1.02	.60	Intellectual appraisal.
3.01	1.05	.59	Psychology of physical disabilities.
3.71	1.16	.58	Tests and measurements.
2.87	1.16	.55	Educational psychology.
			II Psychodiagnosis
4.46	.80	.77	Abnormal
3.83	1.16	.75	Projective techniques.
4.32	.99	.74	Psychotherapy.
4.37	.91	.68	Psychodiagnosis.

Table 1

II Psychodiagnosis (cont'd)

Mean	SD	Loadings	
3.54	1.16	.67	DSM.
3.29	.98	.55	Neuropsychology.
4.22	1.02	.53	Intellectual appraisal.
3.91	.93	.47	Motivation.
3.89	.98	.47	Group process.

III Vocational

2.72	1.17	.82	Vocational psychology (world of work).
2.37	1.06	.80	Job opportunities.
2.62	1.03	.62	Values clarification.
4.31	.97	.52	Counseling.
1.95	1.10	.48	Industrial/organizational psychology.

IV Developmental

4.20	.96	.71	Developmental psychology.
4.37	.80	.67	Personality.
3.97	.97	.65	Individual differences.
3.32	1.04	.63	Social psychology.

V Quantitative

2.73	1.12	.80	Research methods.
2.73	1.10	.79	Statistics.
2.08	1.12	.74	Computer processing.

VI Biological

3.37	.93	.71	Biological bases of behavior.
3.12	.98	.56	Community resources.

PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

I Practitioner

4.52	.65	.79	Genuine.
4.44	.72	.74	Empathic

Table 1

I Practitioner (cont'd)

Mean	SD	Loadings	
4.59	.57	.73	Flexible.
4.45	.70	.69	Caring.
4.16	.96	.62	Team player.
4.06	.75	.59	Handles stress easily.
3.86	.87	.59	Curious.
4.18	.76	.59	Sense of humor.
			II Scientist
3.37	.87	.80	Reads journals.
2.08	.96	.79	Publishes.
3.20	.90	.74	Attends professional meetings.

Note: Item means and standard deviations based on a scale from 1, not desirable, to 5, essential, in selecting a professional psychologist. Only items with factor loadings exceeding .45 are included.

Table 2

Significant Correlations Among Factorial Composites for Functions, Personal Characteristics and Knowledge Areas

Composites	Diag k	Appr f	Cont f	Lear k	Devl k	Prac c	Voc f	Voc k	Supv f	Quan k	Sci c	Bio k	Bio f
Therapy function	41				38			31					46
Psychodiagnostic know.		66		30		39							
Clinical Appraisal func.			39	60	37	36							
Consultation func.				46			33						
Applied learning know.					44		53	32		37		32	
Developmental know.						58			36			38	
Practioner charact.										30		39	
Vocational function							60			35	34	30	32
Vocational knowledge										40	36		
Supervision function											60		
Quantitative knowledge													
Scientist charact.													
Biological knowledge													
Biobehavioral function													

Note. Factorial composites are grouped to illustrate relationships.